Elina Druker · Björn Sundmark ·
Åsa Warnqvist · Mia Österlund (editors)

# Silence and Silencing

## in Children's Literature

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ELINA DRUKER, BJÖRN SUNDMARK,
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MAKADAM

MAKADAM PUBLISHERS
GÖTEBORG · STOCKHOLM
WWW.MAKADAMBOK.SE

*Published with support from*
The Sven and Dagmar Salén Foundation (Sven och Dagmar Saléns Stiftelse)
The Längman Culture Foundation (Stiftelsen Längmanska kulturfonden)
Helge Ax:son Johnson's Foundation (Helge Ax:son Johnsons Stiftelse)
and congress proceedings

*Studies Published by the Swedish Institute for Children's Books 156*

*Silence and Silencing in Children's Literature*


Printed by Bulls Graphics, Halmstad 2021
Cover illustration © Linda Bondestam

ISBN 978-91-7061-367-8
ISSN 0347-5387

# CONTENTS

## ADDRESSING AETONORMATIVE SILENCES



## STRUCTURAL AND SOCIETAL SILENCES AND SILENCING

## TRAUMA AND TRAUMATIC SILENCES

# Foreword

This volume stems from an international congress, IRSCL Congress 2019: Silence and Silencing in Children's Literature, which took place in Stockholm, Sweden, 14–18 August 2019. The event was hosted by the Swedish Institute for Children's Books in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Languages, and Media at Malmö University and the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University, both in Sweden, and the Faculty of Arts, Psychology, and Theology at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. The members of the organising committee – main organiser Docent Åsa Warnqvist and co-organisers Professor Elina Druker, Professor Björn Sundmark, and Docent Mia Österlund – are also the editors of this book. The congress was the 24th Biennial Congress of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) and celebrated the start of the society's 50th anniversary. A record-breaking 513 delegates from 52 countries took part in the congress, making it the biggest congress in IRSCL history.

The congress received generous financial support from the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond), the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland), the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland (Svenska kulturfonden i Finland), the Nordic Culture Fund (Nordisk Kulturfond), Malmö University (Malmö universitet), Stockholm University (Stockholms universitet), Åbo Akademi University (Åbo Akademi), the Swedish Institute for Children's Books (Svenska barnboksinstitutet), and the IRSCL. It also received generous support from the following sponsors: City of Stockholm (Stockholms stad), Moomin Characters Oy Ltd, Astrid Lindgren AB, Rabén & Sjögren, Junibacken, the Astrid Lindgren Society (Astrid Lindgren-sällskapet), Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, Bonnier Carlsen, Lilla Piratförlaget, Alfabeta, Natur & Kultur, Berghs förlag, and the Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize (Nordiska rådets barn- och ungdomslitteraturpris).

ANNA KÉRCHY

# The Acoustics of Nonsense in Lewis Carroll's Alice Tales

Lewis Carroll's Alice stories subvert conventional modes of "mature" representation with the help of narratological strategies that allow verbal agency for implied child readers/authors.[1] His literary nonsense has liberated juvenile audiences of all eras by assisting them in breaking out of the prison-house of socially assigned meanings through vanguardist rhetorics, illustration, and book design. These tactics invite child readers to interact inquisitively with the texts and immerse themselves in the sensorial acoustic qualities of discourse. They also urge youngsters to picture sounds, imagine sign language, talk with/as animals, and fantasise about the functioning of language beyond the customary verbal registers of signification. These nonsense fairy-tale fantasies, then, outline an egalitarian agenda that makes heard the socially "othered" whose voice and autonomy are often stifled. By endowing children with a unique, distinctive voice of their own, giving them the right both to speak up and to be listened to, and by playfully disrupting adult logic, language, and authority, the ludic politics of Carrollian nonsense contributed to the liberation and the coming of age of children's literature.

## "What Would You Do?": Invitations to Inquiry and Interaction

Much of the appeal of Carroll's Alice stems from the ambiguity of this chatty, yet often hushed, rebellious but frustrated child who must curiously oscillate between discursive agency and disempowerment throughout her Wonderland adventures. Alice is a polite little bourgeois girl who relates with patience, trust, and a benevolent open-hearted curiosity to all the odd creatures she meets on her picaresque journey. As Gillian Beer has suggested, Alice keeps asking questions about the reality surrounding her; she is enchanted by its incomprehensibility and seeks mutuality and learns empathy through Socratic dialogism (116). In Kit Kelen's view, her inquisitive nature keeps her in the domain

of childhood curiosity but also leads her towards knowledge that will allow her to become an adult who can formulate her own answers (77). For Perry Nodelman, Alice's constant questioning of the reality around her, demanding explanations from the creatures she meets and interrogating the explanations they offer, turns Carroll's story into a "metafictional account of any reader's encounter with any fictional world" (Nodelman 17).

Its peculiar language games make Carroll's nonsense fantasies delightful, baffling, even, as Sissy Helff and Nadia Butt describe it, "tantalizing" for readers, especially because Alice's dream-voyage is closer to suspended animation than teleological *Bildungsroman* development. Despite her multiple metamorphoses, she remains a seven-year-old child, inhibited in her speech. Alice's experience of claustrophobic confinement and schizoid identity crisis often result in episodes of selective mutism and miscommunication, when she does not seem to find the right words or fails to receive sufficient answers. Her seemingly endless series of strange encounters all prove to be frustrated acts of communication. No wonder she becomes perplexed and irritated by being forced to listen to the countless crazy rhymes and tall tales the Wonderland inhabitants relate, instead of helping her find out who in the world she is.

Nevertheless, Carroll's text holds indubitable vanguardist potential for empowering young readers (Dusinberre 5). After her struggles in a world ruled by adult language she cannot master, where she is too often hushed by authority figures – an experience that child readers can certainly relate to – Alice claims the right to be loquacious and dares to rebel against the pseudo-adults's verbal bullying. She rejects the royal imperative "Hold your tongue!" (Carroll and Gardner 129) meant to silence her during the final trial scene. Hence, she refutes repressive Victorian pedagogical practices such as rote learning and conduct books, including "Children should be seen and not heard in the company of adults". Her loud protest "Stuff and nonsense! [...] You are nothing but a pack of cards" (129) breaks the spell of Wonderland and makes her wake up. But the Victorian social reality she returns to is radically altered in its distribution of power and discursive positionalities. Her rebellious performative speech act allows her to mature into a storyteller: we know from the framing narrative that once she grows up she will narrate tales of her adventures to her own children. Thus, she empowers young readers by embracing fantasising agency, a gift of girlish imaginativeness, the ability to speak up, share stories, and create democratic intergenerational bonding where child and adult are equal partners who alternate between interchangeable positions of storyteller and listener.

Carroll's prefatory poem to *Wonderland* clearly pays tribute to child friends and muses as co-authors. The Liddell sisters who accompanied him "all in the golden afternoon" (Carroll and Gardner 7) on the legendary rowing expedition not only inspired the Alice tales, but also took an active part in shaping the

narrative course of events by interrupting "the extempore romance" (Cohen 31) with questions, comments, and requests. ("Let there be nonsense in it!" was their most vital imperative.) The frame verse mockingly contends that the voice of his young travelling companions is much louder than the adult author's: "Yet what can one poor voice avail / against three tongues together?" His "breath too weak to stir the tiniest feather" is contrasted with their "happy voices". The fictional figure of Alice called collectively into being is also primarily associated with her uninhibited verbal skills: she is a dream child "in friendly chat with bird or beast" (Carroll and Gardner 7).

As Björn Sundmark observes, the dialogic quality of the tale, allowing for audience participation and reminiscent of the oral fairy-tale tradition, is emphatically foregrounded in *The Nursery Alice* (1890), an adaptation designed for early or pre-reader children. The original Alice stories move from the "oral literary mode" of the first manuscript version, *Alice's Adventures Underground*, to the "literary orality" of the revised *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, characterised by "clichés, repetitions, and the omnipresent, intimate voice of the narrator" (126). We also find metatextual asides meant to generate readerly interaction and conversations that continue beyond the pages of the book. For example, in *Wonderland*, while Alice is falling down the rabbit hole, her absent-minded soliloquy is only interrupted by the omniscient narrator's bracketed commentary that directly addresses the implied readers, urging them to add their verbal contribution to the storyline: "and she tried to curtsey as she spoke – fancy curtseying as you're falling through the air! Do you think you could manage it?" (14). As Jack Zipes has remarked, the greatest merit of the Alice books is their ability to make child readers think for themselves (73). I would add that they also encourage them to speak for themselves.

Because of their manifold interpretive layers, the Alice books lend themselves easily to being read as "writerly texts", in Roland Barthes's sense of the term. They explode literary codes, destabilise expectations, and assign readers an active role in the construction of meanings with the aim of offering textual "bliss" (Barthes 21) by allowing for play with language, a proliferation of significations, and eventually an escape from confined subject positions. However, Michelle Pagni Stewart's notion of "speakerly text" is equally suited to describing these illustrated literary nonsense books where "gaps/tensions" between sound and sense, between words and images, between the oral and the written, the told and the untold inspire readers' imaginations, invite conversations (between teller and listener) and retellings, too. *The Nursery Alice* is a pictorial-oral distillation of the *Wonderland* narrative. The "synaesthesis of words/pictures and orality" (Stewart 47), the "give and take between teller (or [...] reader) and the audience" (43), the instability and free-play of meanings, the performativity of storytelling negotiating textual meanings, the multiplicity of voices resulting

from audience interaction, and "the stories within stories" (46) add to the initial narrative rather than detracting from it.

In *The Nursery Alice*, textual instances of the narrative's oral qualities include the typical expressive and emotive phrases used in oral storytelling; for instance, "and lo and behold" (Carroll, *Nursery* 10). We find rhetorical questions requiring support for the continuation for the story, as in "Would you like to hear what it was that she dreamed about?" (1); or promoting readers' sympathetic immersion in Alice's adventures and encouraging improvisation and alternative storylines with each retelling: "What do you think she did?" (5, 17, 20, 26). References to illustrations mock the narrative's play with readerly expectations by facilitating or complicating the guesswork: "if you look at the picture, you'll see exactly what Alice saw when she got inside" (30); "Let's try if we can make out all the twelve [members of the jury]" (52). The direct physical involvement of the audience is foregrounded in the reading experience and the making (up) of the story: "if you turn up the corner of this leaf, you'll have Alice looking at the grin the same way she was looking at the Cat – not in the least frightened" (33). In all Alice editions, oral, conversational narrative features abound to maximally stimulate readers' co-authorial performance and boost interactive delights.[2]

## "Sound First – Sense Afterwards": Boosting Acoustic Agency

In Carroll's literary nonsense, the vocal qualities of the neologisms tie in with oral tradition in the form of story*telling* associated with children's literature read out loud by adults to pre-readers or by early readers to themselves. Vocalising written words improves phonological awareness, facilitates semantic comprehension, and provides a metadiscursive perspective on meaning formation complemented by the sensorial pleasure of mouth movements. The affective bonds built between teller and listener facilitate the collective agency integral to oral interpretation.

Paradoxically, Alice's dream story is a very loud text that also foregrounds the acoustic qualities of waking life. In a prologue to *Wonderland*, Alice's older sister continues her sibling's fantasising in a brief passage that perfectly illustrates how the insistence on orality – eight onomatopoeias and four words referring to voice, noise, cries, and clamour in one single sentence! – can disorganise hierarchical structures of meaning, call to life Wonderland, and make everyday lived reality seem enchanting, by celebrating imagination as a foundation of sisterly solidarity.

> So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change

> to dull reality – the grass would be only rustling in the wind, and the pool rippling to the waving of the reeds – the rattling teacups would change to tinkling sheep-bells, and the Queen's shrill cries to the voice of the shepherd boy – and the sneeze of the baby, the shriek of the Gryphon, and all the other queer noises, would change (she knew) to the confused clamour of the busy farm-yard – while the lowing of the cattle in the distance would take the place of the Mock Turtle's heavy sobs. (Carroll and Gardner 131–132)

The Carrollian text is meant to be read out loud by ideal readers – solitary "children of all ages" (as the dedication suggests), as well as mothers and nurses entertaining pre-readers, or in witty companies of bourgeois drawing rooms – who will gain acoustic pleasure from the strange noises of Wonderland. These noises include Gryphon shrieks, Queenly cries, and Mock Turtle sobs, which overwhelm the soothing, toned-down audioscape of waking life.

Carroll's tales attract child readers partly because of their rebellious orality. Alice asks questions and speaks up against the adult voices that try to silence her. She is also trying to acquire a *taste* of all the odd-sounding expressions she has never heard before. Much like readers of the Alice books, she feeds on words learned from the characters she meets in Wonderland's richly verbal realm. At the Mad Tea Party, the Hatter does not let her drink any tea. Instead she is entertained by the dormouse's tale about the little girls who live in the treacle well where, to satisfy one's hunger, one can only draw things beginning "with an M such as mouse-traps, and the moon, and memory, and muchness" (Carroll and Gardner 80). In the second volume too, having stepped through the looking-glass, Alice emerges as a voracious reader who struggles to make sense of the Jabberwocky poem's mirrored mouthful of nonsense. "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe; All mimsy were the borogoves / And the mome raths outgrabe" she reads, admitting to herself that she has bitten off more than she can chew. She ends up providing a dictionary definition of the nonsense genre by mumbling to herself: "It seems very pretty [...] but it's rather hard to understand! [...] Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas – only I don't exactly know what they are!" (Carroll and Gardner 156).

Carroll invented Wonderland not as a home for fairies but as a place where all creatures are endowed with a language they use to "wrestle, tug, rejoice, and claim authority with" (Foulkes in Beer 106). Carrollian language games illustrate how the disciplinary and transgressive natures of discourse are necessarily concomitant and how the creation of rules also means that these rules can be violated. Carroll enters the "free zone" where children dwell, where the struggles for and against language take place simultaneously (Beer 3). Literary nonsense balances "between verbal chaos and verbal constraints, between the need for meaning and the refusal of meaning" (Lecercle, "Translate" 90),

between adult and childish registers of signification. On the one hand, as language philosopher Jean Jacques Lecercle emphasizes in *Philosophy of Nonsense: The Intuitions of Victorian Nonsense Literature* (1994), we experience a mature metalinguistic recognition of the malfunctioning of conventional strategies of representation and interpretation. On the other hand, literary nonsense enables the free release of the infantile transverbal acoustic qualities of discourse: the repetition, rhythm, and vocality that permeate the communication of speechless, but not voiceless, infants, reintegrate a repressed corporeal immediacy into the text, as Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytically informed semanalytical theory of revolutionary poetic language use suggests (*Revolution* 40). In U. C. Knoepflmacher's wording, Carroll "tapped creative energies that originated from an anti-linguistic otherworld that [he] identified with the early phases of childhood" (153). Thus he could excel in mediating between "the child for whom words are new and the adult for whom language has lost all its freshness" (154).

Gillian Beer's description of the Alice books' profound affinity with childhood experience and their hidden and abiding presence in adult language resonates perfectly with Kristevan theory.

> The babble conversation of the infant lies beneath the adult talk: infant communication is plosive, punctuated by nouns, each with a broad nimbus of meaning, and informed by cadences of inquiry, assertion, and denial. It is revived in puns, exclamations, sing-song, laughter, and cries current in adult speech. (Beer 2)

When we spell out loud the names of slithy toves, mimsy borogoves, mome raths, and jubjub birds, the "sonorous joy" or "jouissance" (Kristeva, *Desire* 16) of literary nonsense pushes at the borders of signification. It foregrounds the infantile embodied performative experience of "doing things with sounds,"[1] creating and disrupting meanings by releasing the vocal charge of verbal forms.

## Discursive Malfunctions: Sleeptalking and Stuttering

Vocal liberation and verbal frustration coincide in nonsense. For Gilles Deleuze, nonsense is an expressive mode – when the carnivalesque "collapse of language realizes another world" – to the "grotesque trinity of child, poet, and madman" (*Logic* 83). Alice's curious adventures with illogically misbehaving language were certainly inspired by Carroll's own confrontations with the limits of speakability imposed by Victorians codes of conduct, the philosophical struggle with words inapt for conveying intended meanings, as well as his own speech impediment, resulting in communication flaws he eventually transformed into children's poetry. Carroll was fascinated by theories of mind-voy-

aging, which allowed dreamers to "migrate into fairyland" (Warner 205–220) and revealed to the closed "inner eye" unspeakable things normally unavailable to sensory perception. Since dreaming provides the narrative framework of both Alice books, the curious journeys can be interpreted as products of Alice's dreaming imagination. Nonsensical language games can be associated with somniloquy's illogical verbal performances that fall beyond conscious, rational control, grounded in an acoustic uncanny, whereby familiar words suddenly gain an unfamiliar ring and unfamiliar expressions evoke a feeling of *déjà vu/ déjà entendu*.

Carroll's interest in otherworldly speech acts, discursive malfunctions, and the physical experience of sounds probably arises from his own speech impediment. He suffered from a lifelong stammer as well as deafness in the right ear, attributed to infantile fever. Some suggest that he shied away from public oral presentations because of his speech defect; others speculate that he felt at ease only in conversation with child friends. He recorded his linguistic malfunction in the mock self-portrait of the Dodo bird (because of his stutter he could only pronounce his name as Do-Do-Dodgson) (Kelly 22). Punning creates intimacy here and is grounded in insider knowledge accessible to the target audience – little Alice Liddell and others who could recall the voice of the author. Hence, oral traits are integrated in the text, tongue in cheek. Further language disturbances thematised in the Alice books include stammering, aphasia, tip of the tongue experience, dysarthria (slurred or unclear speech) – all performed by Alice. Hence, the flawed/erroneous language use of children becomes the narrative engine of nonsense literature as well as a ground of philosophical speculation. It is tempting to interpret Carroll/Do-Do-Dodgson as a creative stutterer in Gilles Deleuze's sense of the term. He was "a foreigner to his own language," who derived phonetic, lexical, and syntactic creations from speech defects, a writer who used stuttering "to stretch language along abstract and infinitely varied lines," to "make [language] take flight … and send [it] racing, to ceaselessly [place] it in a state of disequilibrium" (Deleuze, *Essays* 109).

Carroll was very much preoccupied with the sound of the articulated verbal pronunciation. He owned a Voice Cultivation Machine (Woolf 78) and attended sessions with speech therapist James Hunt. Just how much Carroll was aware of the art of elocution is attested by letters in his correspondence in which he shared the lessons learned from Dr Hunt. Writing to Edith Lucy, who attended his logic classics at Oxford High School and played Bianca in a theatrical performance, he observes:

> the performance on the whole was very poor … it was simply and solely the fault of bad delivery … with one or perhaps two exceptions, you have all to learn the elements of stage elocution, such things as to pronounce

> every letter, to make all the consonants audible, and those who lisp (and most people lisp a little) must give special sharpness and force to the Ss and above all never to go quicker than is consistent with perfect articulation. (Carroll, *Diaries* 507)

However, Carroll's simultaneous recognition of the disciplinary and the ludic qualities of language is perfectly illustrated by how his own pedantic advice seems mocked by hilariously absurd lines in the Alice books. The Duchess's lullaby, "Speak roughly to your little boy and beat him when he sneezes," is one example; Alice's fussing about "her voice sound(ing) hoarse and strange, and the words not com(ing) the same as they used to do" is another (Carroll and Gardner 64, 23).

The episodes in which Alice makes frustrated attempts to properly recall didactic verse she believes she should have memorised during her elementary education are particularly interesting, because they shed light on the ambiguous interpretive possibilities of Carroll's tale. This speech act puts her memory on trial, as it were. It shows whether she has remained herself or changed into someone else. James Kincaid severely criticises this as a sign of the "failed fantasy" of a deeply disciplined "false child" (95). However, it is important to note that instead of the moralising, sentimental originals, only mock parodies come to Alice's lips unbidden, in a nearly unconscious automatic manner. Her lapsus-like stuttering is reminiscent of somniloquy. Throughout Alice's misremembering, the rhymes "come and grow by themselves."[4] The ones that she used to "know by heart," like all educated Victorian children, appear distorted. Hence, the verses Alice enacts underline the elusiveness of the most fundamental foundation of meaning. They become nonsensical both for Victorians who are familiar with the original rhymes, and thus recognise that Carroll is poking fun at the established children's literature of his time, and for contemporary readers who can revel in postmodern textual pleasures of unrestrained, referentless, or de-referentialised signification.

## Picturing Talking Hands and Silent Screams

The Alice book's image-textual dynamics challenged representational conventions by fusing the poetic imagery of verbal language games with picture poems that transformed text into image, as when the mouse's tale takes the form of a mouse's tail,[5] as well as illustrations of sounds and even sign language. In his study of John Tenniel's illustrations for Carroll's books, Michael Hancher explains how "the unusually complementary relationship" of text and image (118) in the carefully crafted page layout plays with intermedial transitions. This vanguardist book design introduced tactility into the registers of visual

and acoustic experience to engage and empower child readers leafing through the book by turning transverbal communication into a vital structuring device of the narrative.

As Jennifer Esmail's book *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2013) contends, language constituted a focal point for debates about human uniqueness in the late nineteenth century (4). The linguistic capabilities of non-speaking humans (children and deaf people), as well as those of talking animals, became a cultural concern because they challenged Victorian ideas of human value and troubled the definition of the human as a speaking animal. The medico-pedagogical oralism movement forced deaf children to speak and lip-read instead of using sign language, because the bodily gestures of sign language were regarded as an inferior mode of communication, available to animals too (14).

I would like to suggest that the hands featured in John Tenniel's illustrations to the Alice books enter into dialogue with the Victorian dilemma over the verbal versus the non-verbal divide. Alice's hands intrude from an extradiegetic into the intradiegetic realm and introduce a metaleptic dimension to the text, as if the playing child brings the fictional universe into being through manual manoeuvres. But the close-ups of hands also embed sign language within nonsense, enhancing the corporeal register of signification and challenging the Victorian prioritisation of (disembodied) telling over (overembodied) showing.

The importance of hands in Tenniel's illustrations is highlighted by the fact that the most iconic characters of the books – playing cards and chess figures – have hands, "despite their original anatomy" (Wong 138). The Dodo bird has both wings and hands: he stands for "both/and" instead of "either/or." In the tale he challenges everyone to a race where everyone is a winner and no one is a loser. In the Victorian imagination, he serves as a warning about the dangers of human intervention into natural matters (perhaps a warning against the oralism movement) and an object of curiosity that inspired taxidermists of the time to create from various bird parts (geese, swans, and others) the likeness of this extinct species (these share an affinity with Carroll's portmanteau neologisms merging multiple word fragments to create the likeness of language). It seems telling that Carroll's fictional self-portrait is a flightless, songless anachronistic creature reaching out his hands towards the child friend, yearning for tactile connection and to explore the physical dimensions of discourse.

Mou-Lan Wong calls attention to how the picturing of hand movements in Tenniel's illustrations conveys a sense of orality. The Mad Hatter is raising his hands in a singing pose while performing the "Star," the Queen of Hearts is pointing her fingers when she is screaming orders for Alice's beheading, and the King is gesticulating vehemently when he is having a loud argument with the executioner (138). The picture of Alice's own giant hands in the miniature

John Tenniel. "Alice's hand grabs at Rabbit." Wood engraving. Block cut by Dalziel Brothers. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

Wonderland scene illustrates a passage that abounds in noisy sound effects (image above). Auditory stimuli are visually translated into sign language:

> She fancied she heard the White Rabbit just under the window, she suddenly spread out her hand, and made a snatch in the air. She did not get hold of anything, but she heard a little shriek and a fall, a clash of broken glass. (Carroll and Gardner 42)

I agree with Wong that Alice's hands in the Tenniel images also represent the hands of the reader who is invited to enter into tactile interaction with the book-object, courtesy of the creative book design that resulted from the author's and illustrator's singular collaboration. The reader's physical participation in vitalising the dynamic dialogue between text and image is necessary for the unfolding of the plotline. It is the calculated corporeal involvement of the audience in the form of the reader's hands turning the pages that enacts Alice's movement to the other side of the looking-glass and the Cheshire Cat's vanishing. Via typographical play, the text is disrupted mid-sentence on one page and continued on the next one: "In another moment Alice was through ... the glass" (Carroll and Gardner 148–149). The illustration is doubled and reversed on the two sides of the same sheet, so that the book page itself can miraculously transform into a mirror. As the reader leafing through the book assists in a

simple optical illusion, the Cat is made to disappear with only its grin remaining behind, whereas Alice contemplating the Cat becomes lost amidst the text, "overwritten by words" (Wong 146), engulfed by the grin (Carroll and Gardner 67, 69). In *The Nursery Alice*, Carroll invites readers to transform their book into a plaything by urging them to shake it to see how the White Rabbit trembles with fear and to fold the page to see how brave little Alice is when she faces the mouth of the vanishing cat closing up on words.

In other books, the illustrations' silent picturing of loud noises is an exciting counter-narrative addendum to the acoustic text. The gaping mouth of the horrendous Jabberwock in Tenniel's drawing offers an odd visual representation of a silent scream, a voiceless cry that opens up transmedial, audiovisual interpretive dimensions. The picture of the frail childlike knight ready to slay the monster with the sword can be understood as symbolising Alice, the implied reader-interpreter, as she struggles with the textual monstrosity. The impossible challenge of making sense of nonsense is epitomised by the Jabberwock, a mythical beast Alice encounters in the form of a mirror-written picturepoem she immediately tries to decode on crossing through the looking-glass. As Sundmark points out, Alice repeatedly attempts to translate the "Jabberwocky" poem, which, unusually, is a written text amidst a plethora of orally presented rhymes and songs. First, she converts the reversed sign system (image) into a readable version (text). Then, she recodes the written text by memorising it. She shifts her mental image-text of the poem into the oral medium. She has Humpty Dumpty recode the text into the "mock-philological register" and, finally, she invites readers' (re)interpretations of these "textually represented transactions" that inspire all "to read imaginatively!" (Sundmark 182).

The picture of Alice facing the Jabberwock might depict not only the reader-interpreter's struggle to make sense of nonsense on the semantic and syntactic levels,[6] but also the speaker's phonological fight for correct articulation: to make words sound right. The failure to speak properly is a recurring frustration for Alice throughout her dream adventures' "conversational combats" and a foundational experience for newcomers to (both spoken and written) language, children learning to speak or read, "apprentice, dilettante speakers, amateurs of the sentence" (Phillips 15) who transition slowly from inarticulate babble to articulate language, from deformed sign to legible word.

The metanarrative and metapictorial meanings of "Jabberwocky" gain further exciting implications if we consider how the gaping mouth that remains silent stages Carroll's own speech defect. His hesitation was described by child friend May Barber as "rather terrifying," "it wasn't exactly a stammer, because there was no noise, he just opened his mouth. But there was a wait, a very nervous wait from everybody's point of view: it was very curious" (Smith 172). Carroll, in his correspondence with speech therapist William H. R. Rivers,

referred to his struggles with correct pronunciation with military metaphors: "Thanks for advice about hard 'C,' which I acknowledge as my vanquisher in singlehand combat, at present" (178). Apparently, stammering was a monstrosity to be overcome. It was stigmatised in the Victorian era and associated with vices such as effeminacy, masturbation, indolence, vanity, and misanthropy (Foulkes 18; Lane 20).[7] The knight struggling with the Jabberwock-symbolising-language is an alter ego of Alice, who can also be regarded as yet another fictional self-portrait of Carroll (see Robson 139). Nonsense literature, infantile echolalia (repetition of speech), the Jabberwock's howl, like stammering, all produce sounds devoid of meaning – hence they simultaneously frighten and fascinate the creative artist and are reminiscent of child language-users' vulnerability and rebelliousness.

## Talking With/Like Animals

The Jabberwock is also a hybrid creature, mingling the bestial and the human. As a chimeric composite of different actual and mythical animal species – insects, rodents, serpents, dragons, and dinosaurs – this creature is a perfect visual equivalent of the Carrollian portmanteau language game of squeezing multiple words to form neologisms. As a representation of the struggle with language, the Jabberwock challenges Alice's (and by extension the readers') humanistic belief in her own superiority by challenging her capacity to speak correctly. However, the Jabberwock is also part of the Carrollian bestiary of talking animals who fulfil an egalitarian agenda by lending a voice to the socially "othered" who have been deprived of autonomy. As a female child often mistaken in Wonderland for a beast, Alice is a multiply marginalised figure who balances on the borders of intelligibility and talks with/like animals to rebelliously reclaim her acoustic agency.

The Alice books offer a twisted take on the talking animal story.[8] Instead of simply moralising on human shortcomings, they reflect on the era's scientific views: Darwin's evolutionary theory, which argues for the kinship of animals and humans and in particular non-speaking children. Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Men and Animals* (1872) hints at the kinship of the pre-linguistic baby babbles and inarticulate animal cries and seems to regard infants as "the missing link" between human and animal: more primitive, more poetic, and more natural than Man (18, 91–93, 212).[9] In a mocking response to these ideas, the animals in the *Alice* books are anthropomorphised by being both gifted and burdened with language, while the human child undergoes the animalising transformations of theriomorphisation and struggles with running out of words. Alice, with her elongated neck, is seen as a snake by the pigeon, a baby transforms into a pig by being called one, and the Caterpillar and the Fawn

increase Alice's identity crisis by silencing her with their questioning "Who she is?", "What she is?", and "What she calls herself?"

Language spoken (mispronounced and misinterpreted) by humans and animals alike plays a prominent role in transmitting a "posthumanist message". This exposes, undermines, and ironically re-establishes boundaries between the human and non-human, to "facilitate a dialogue as to how those borders might become more fluid," as Zoe Jaques puts it (3). Carroll, as a defender of animal rights (see "Vivisection"), conceives of interspecies differences in a non-binary model. He describes Alice with positive animal attributes, "loving as a dog" and "gentle as a fawn" ("Alice on the Stage" 225), and explains how the little girl's imaginative pretence troubles the adult–child, human–animal hierarchy by embracing wild animality via performative speech acts such as "*Nurse*! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena, and you're a bone!" (Carroll and Gardner 147). On the other hand, the "talking food" creatures, such as the "communicative soup recipe" of the Mock Turtle Soup, urge readers to think of animals as more than just things to be consumed. They serve to "displace the naturalised assumption of [the speaking/meat-eating] human's dominion over the [silent/edible] animal" (Jaques 50).

In a telling episode, the Mock Turtle mentions whiting to Alice and she first associates the fish with the dish she eats for dinner, but cuts short her response when she remembers that the whiting was the snail's dance partner in the Lobster Quadrille. In other words, she hastily adopts the animal perspective by recognising the whiting as an autonomous, sentient, cognisant citizen of the wondrous realm she attempts to accommodate to throughout her brief visit. Alice's self-correction results in a mishearing that amuses readers and paves the way for a rapid evolution of the whiting from food object to autonomous real person to fictitious textual creature mobilised by wordplay:

> "Yes," said Alice, "I've often seen them [whiting] at din–" she checked herself hastily. "I don't know where Dinn may be," said the Mock Turtle, "but if you've seen them so often, of course you know what they're like." (Carroll and Gardner 107)

Throughout her Wonderland adventures Alice tries her best to talk with/like animals. Her addressing the mouse in the only French sentence she knows "Où est ma chatte?" can be interpreted as a benevolent attempt at approaching the foreignness of the other as well as an ironic commentary on the failure of language. Then, her pondering about "the right way of speaking to a mouse" (26), her willingness to change the subject so as not to hurt the rodent's feelings, her apologising, and her soothing of her interlocutor all underline how this interspecies verbal exchange proves to be a lesson in solidarity for the little human.

Ironically, Alice enjoys the most intense moment of tender companionship with an animal in a transverbal episode of *Looking-Glass* when she meets the Fawn in the "Woods Where Things Have No Names". In this fabulous place all beings can apparently escape the violence involved in language. A non-discursive, nonsensical classification grounded in empathic interspecies interrelationality allows Alice to embrace the Fawn, as the child can be "grouped with other organisms 'like any other natural species'" (Dusinberre 7), hinting at humanity's new, post-Darwinian position as merely that of a "nameless" clever animal (Lovell-Smith 39). This scene also crystallises the "innate connection" the Victorian imagination traces between child and animal as similarly subordinated and silenced, relentlessly rebellious, and resilient beings. As a female child, Alice is aligned with unknowable Nature, but she also stands for a "querulous human observation of nature as mysteriously other" (Lovell-Smith 47). Hence she is just as ambiguous a figure as the talking animal creatures she converses with.

Most importantly, in the Alice books "child and animal overlap, address, and reflect one another," "each subjected to an awkward dialogue as to what is 'real' and what is 'represented'" (Jaques 13). They both refuse to be talked down to and dare to speak up. The main political message of literary nonsense argues for the equality of all living things grounded in the right to name oneself and respond, and the responsibility to hear the others who have been deprived of a voice and agency, and – as the Fawn-meets-Alice episode shows us – even the pleasure of sharing silences.

Fictionalising interspecies communication, like picturing sounds and boosting readers' interactive acoustic agency, belongs to the rich catalogue of Lewis Carroll's subversive narratological strategies that disclose and destabilise discourses of oppression. These intricately interconnected verbal/visual manoeuvres have amused, liberated, and empowered young audiences by defying representational conventions and dismissing didactic agendas and rhetorical protocols. The message of Wonderland is encapsulated in the Gryphon's call: "that's enough about lessons. Tell her something about the games now" (86). By endowing the child with a unique, distinctive voice of its own, the right both to speak up and to be listened to, and playfully disrupting adult logic, language, and authority, the ludic politics of Carrollian nonsense contributed to both the liberation and the coming of age of children's literature.[10]

## Notes

1. I use the terms "Alice books" or "Alice tales" to refer to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871).

2. Sometimes they are grouped together in one single paragraph, as in this pas-

sage in *Wonderland*: "Now look at the picture, and you'll soon guess what happened next. It looks just like the sea, doesn't it? But it really is the Pool of Tears – all made of Alice's tears, you know! … Suppose you were swimming about in a Pool of Tears … wouldn't you swim as hard as you could go?" (11–12).

3. Language philosopher J. L. Austin's speech act theory that highlights the performative power of language is outlined in his *How to Do Things with Words* and could be extended into transverbal, acoustic realms of language use.

4. This is an expression Carroll uses in 1886 to comment retrospectively on his way of composing the Alice tales.

5. The typographic play used to reflect the subject of the text in the Mouse's Tale/Tail is exploited half a century later in the visual poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* and early 20th century Dadaist and Futurist experiments.

6. Henry Kuttner's short story "Mimsy were the Borogoves" postulates that the language of "Jabberwocky" can only be understood by children whose minds have not been yet structured according to Euclidean logic.

7. C. P. Bronson's 1855 study *Stammering: Its Causes, Effects, Remedies* tied speech disorders to a host of "analogous nervous diseases" including "hysteria, insanity from despondency, peculiar weaknesses of males and females, misanthropy", and moral delinquency (Lane 20). Anne Stiles's *Popular Fiction and Brain Science in the Late 19th Century* suggests that many late-Victorian alienists and criminologists viewed stuttering as a symptom of degeneracy (131).

8. The most prominent master of the animal fable, Aesop, was also a stutterer.

9. According to Marjorie Lorch and Paula Hellal, Darwin's thoughts on early language acquisition associated with the communication of animals were influenced by the work of Hyppolite Taine, who "compared his daughter's developing language skills to the communicative ability of birds and 'primitive' peoples' themes that echo those found in Rousseau" (141). Similarly, Darwin's observations of the orangutans in London Zoo generated a list of questions about the body language of babies (143), while his *Descent of Man* contended that dogs "are at the same stage of development as infants between the ages of 10 and 12 months who understand many words and short sentences but cannot yet utter a single word" (144).

10. I wish to thank IRSCL for the travel grant that allowed me to participate in the 2019 IRSCL Congress in Stockholm, where I presented an earlier version of this chapter.

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